

Volunteer Manual

Welcome to National History Day in North Dakota

Each year thousands of middle and high school students present their historical research projects in a series of competitions from the local level through to a national contest. First, students select and research a topic connected to an annual theme. Next, they choose to create an exhibit, documentary, performance, website, or research paper to share their work, like professional historians. Finally, these projects are presented at school, regional, state, and national contests where volunteer judges provide students with feedback on their work and recognize their achievements. Volunteers help make these annual contests a success. The goal of National History Day in North Dakota is to provide students with a valuable educational experience, regardless of whether they win prizes. While not every student will choose to become a historian, we hope they will all become lifelong history enthusiasts.

Why volunteer?

Volunteering with National History Day in North Dakota is a lot of fun. It is exciting to talk to students about their work. Volunteers play a huge role in supporting students' interest in their topics, their research, and their projects. Mentors and judges help recognize student achievements and provide valuable feedback. Not only do volunteers have a fun experience working with students, they usually learn something new about history and help support their community in the process.

What do volunteers do?

There are a variety of roles and commitment levels open to volunteers. Volunteers can commit to as little as a few hours on a single day as a judge or a room monitor or spend several weeks organizing school and regional contests. While there are a variety of roles for volunteers to serve in, including mentors, room monitors, judges, and advisory committee members, at any contest, the single biggest need will always be for judges. To learn more about these and other volunteer opportunities, contact state coordinator, Danielle Stuckle, at dlstuckle@nd.gov or 701-328-2794.

Photo Disclaimer

By participating in National History Day in North Dakota, you consent to having your image recorded for informational or publicity purposes. If you object to having your image recorded for any such potential use, you must inform the contest organizers, who will make every effort to honor your wishes.

Mentors and Coaches

Educators, librarians, archivists, curators, historians, and other researchers have a profound impact on the success of National History Day in North Dakota. Mentors, or coaches, help students learn to think like historians. These volunteers help them navigate libraries, archives, and museums. Research open houses help students understand the vast resources available to them besides what is online. Mentors at an open house might do anything from give facility tours to show students how to use special collections and databases. They help students find relevant primary and secondary sources. Mentors also help students select topics and narrow them down to a thesis statement. They might review a student's research progress and provide other feedback. Some mentors help virtually rather than in person and help History Day staff answer student questions in a timely manner.

Serving as a mentor or coach is a great way for pre-service teachers and other college students to become involved in National History Day in North Dakota. Dates and locations for research open house events are determined annually, based on demand.

Advisory Committee

National History Day in North Dakota has an advisory committee that includes educators, historians, librarians, archivists, college students, parents, and other interested volunteers from across the state. This committee is flexible to allow people to get involved to the degree that works for their personal schedules and interest levels. The purpose of the committee is to serve as History Day ambassadors, provide staff with feedback, help organize contests, and help identify support (more than money, but that helps too). This is not a formal board, and committee members can opt out at any time.

Room Monitors

Room monitors ensure History Day competitions run smoothly. They have an important role of supervising and maintaining order during competitions. They also can help calm nervous students by offering a smile and a kind word. The time commitment for a contest is generally about five to six hours and includes a volunteer orientation. The duties of a room monitor vary but usually include:

- Create a welcoming environment in and around all the spaces used for the contest. Keep conversations positive and energized. Let students know how happy we are that they are participating in History Day.
- Serve as a connection or a liaison to contest staff. Help get questions answered in a timely manner or find someone who can.
- Ensure the schedule is followed. Judges should start and end each session on time. Students should arrive on time and be ready to go when their judges are.
- Maintain a low noise level in and around judging areas.
- Rooms for judging exhibits, papers, and websites are closed to the public until announced otherwise.
- Documentaries and performances are open to the public. Audience members should only enter and leave between presentations and should turn their cell phones off.
- Try to calm as many nerves as possible; this is a big day!

Judges

Volunteers with a variety of professional experiences and backgrounds have a huge role to play in the success of National History Day in North Dakota. The only prerequisite is to have enthusiasm and a passion for history. You do not need to be a historian, or know much about a student's specific research area, to serve as a judge. No one is an expert on all the topics presented at a history day contest. This is an opportunity for the student to be the expert. Judges work in teams of two to three people. Newer judges are paired with more experienced judges. Veteran judges serve as the team lead, mentor new judges, and help keep things running smoothly. There is an orientation session before each contest. New volunteers can become acquainted with the judging process. Returning judges can learn more about any changes to the program from previous years.

The most important part of any entry is the research itself rather than the quality of the resulting project. Focus on the strength of the thesis statement, how well students support that thesis statement with evidence, and the overall quality of the research they're presenting. These projects are students' opportunities to demonstrate understanding of the basic elements of historical thinking. They should be able to explain how they narrowed their research topic, their understanding of the topic's historical context, how they developed their thesis statement, how they found and analyzed evidence, and that they considered a variety of perspectives. Be careful to judge all projects evenly regardless of how much you might know about different subject areas.

Judges generally view between five to eight projects per contest, depending on the number of projects entered for each category. Judges are provided with an evaluation form where they write comments for the students about how balanced their research is and whether they provided a solid argument for their topic. Sample evaluation sheets can be found here: www.nhd.org/sites/default/files/merged-11.pdf. Judges should also familiarize themselves with the rules for the category they will be judging. The contest rule book is here: www.nhd.org/sites/default/files/Contest-Rule-Book_0.pdf. The annual theme is here: www.nhd.org/breaking-barriers-history.

Always keep in mind that the goal of National History Day in North Dakota is to provide young learners with a positive experience, regardless of whether they win. Ideally, all students should have a positive discussion of their scholarship with the judges and get meaningful written feedback. As a judge, you are the face of History Day. It is important that interviews and judging be fair and consistent. History Day is likely the most difficult project a student has completed. Talk to students in a way that allows them to feel proud of the work they have done. Remember to smile and be encouraging.

How to Judge History Day Projects

The process outlined below is typical for most of the categories. Specific rules for categories vary. Be sure to read any special instructions when reviewing the contest rules.

Greet First greet and welcome the students. Introduce yourself, shake hands, and try to set them at ease. Give them a brief overview of the interview process. Avoiding asking them where they are from, where they go to school, or what their backgrounds are.

Judges for the website and paper categories will have already seen the projects and will only need to interview students. Students in the exhibit, documentary, and performance categories should provide each judge with a copy of their process paper and annotated bibliography. Students in the performance category should set up while the judges review their written materials.

Read Skim the process papers and annotated bibliographies. Keep at least one copy of the written material for your team to review later in the judges' room. Pay special attention to the annotated bibliography. Bibliographies should be divided into two main sections: primary and secondary sources. There is no required number of sources students need to include. However, they do have to look at a variety of sources related to their topic (more than websites) and include various perspectives on the subject. Students should use MLA or Turabian citation styles. Whichever style they choose, they should be consistent in their formatting. Entries should have a strong thesis statement. A thesis statement is a roadmap for a project. It is a couple of sentences and an argument, or a point of view, on what the project is about. Everything included in the project should support the thesis.

View Judges for research papers and websites will have access to their projects to review them before to the contest date. Exhibit judges can begin reviewing the project at any time they are ready. For documentaries and performances, signal to the students when they can begin. One judge should be assigned to monitor time. Each performance will have five minutes to set up, ten to show the project, and five to be interviewed and take down their things. The next entry may set up while an interview is in progress.

Interview After viewing the project, the process paper, and the annotated bibliography, interview students about their work. This is more like a job interview rather than a formal oral presentation with a beginning, middle, and end. Judges should ask probing, open-ended questions about the entries, but students will

do most of the talking. For group projects, make sure that each student has a chance to answer questions. The interview is not the time for judges to provide direct feedback and suggestions for improvement. Instead, judges should take lots of notes. The evaluation form with judges' comments is the primary delivery method for feedback and suggestions. If there is a rule infraction or factual error, note it on the comment form instead of pointing it out in the interview. If you feel that the student should have an opportunity to defend the point, please broach the subject tactfully.

The sole purpose of the interview is to encourage an active dialogue between historians and students on the process of historical research. It is important to keep the interview positive and meaningful. History Day might be the most difficult project they have ever completed. We want them to walk away with the best possible experience. Please converse with students in a way that allows them to feel proud of the work they have done. Many students are very sensitive to judges' moods and attitudes. They feel crushed if you seem bored, indifferent, or negative. Remember to thank them for participating in National History Day in North Dakota.

Ranking Projects

Return to the judges' meeting room to review each entry with your team. National History Day uses **consensus** judging. This means your team will work together to rank the top entries, rather than assigning numeric scores to each entry. This streamlines the process and avoids the need to spend time calculating scores. The overall ranking must be supported by the whole judging team. Judges' check marks in the columns do not need to be identical, but they should be in the same range. Avoid using the columns "superior" or "needs improvement" excessively unless the whole team agrees. The written comments should also be consistent with the rest of the team. They shouldn't necessarily be the same, but they also should not contradict each other. Judges' decisions are final.

To keep the day's schedule moving along smoothly, rank the top entries first so they can be turned into the contest coordinator as soon as possible. The contest coordinator will let you know the specific number of projects you are selecting to move on to the next level. Judges can continue to write comments and suggestions on the forms after rankings have been submitted as time allows. Some judges only need a few minutes while others may take an hour or more to organize their notes and complete their comments.

Writing Comments

Each judge should complete an evaluation form for each project. These forms are given to students, so they can use the feedback to understand how they can improve their research and their project. This helps students who are advancing

make appropriate changes to compete at higher levels. Students who are not advancing want to understand why their project was not selected.

Students appreciate constructive criticism that helps them understand what they can do better. Consider using the “sandwich” critique method which softens constructive criticism by placing it between two positive comments. Critical comments are best phrased as suggestions (“you may want to,” “did you consider,” or “other issues important to this topic are”). Generic comments such as “good job” or “well done, keep up the good work” don’t tell students anything solid they can use to improve their work.

**Contest
Rules**

Judges will take into consideration rule infractions in their final rankings. There is a difference between minor and major infractions. Judges may choose to note a minor infraction (such as an error on the title page), on the evaluation form but not have to reduce the entry’s ranking. Some infractions, however, can give an entry an unfair advantage over others. Major infractions include things like violating size or time limits. These types of infractions should be taken into consideration, and the final ranking should be reduced accordingly. Infractions for otherwise eligible projects should be corrected before the entry moves on to the next level of competition. Take a close look at the “Rules for All Categories” and the “Individual Category Rules” in the *National History Day Rulebook* for specific rules for each category. Plagiarism or reusing a previous year’s entry will result in disqualification of the entry. If you suspect either of these things, inform your contest coordinator as soon as possible and let them handle the situation.

**Final
Rounds**

If necessary, one member from each judging team may have to stay for a final round of judging, depending on the number of entries in a category. The contest coordinator will let you know the specific number of projects you are selecting to move on to the next level. At the state contest, the top two entries from each division (age group) and category (both project type and individual or group) are eligible to move on to the national contest.

Judging Criteria

Historical Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the work show historical research and scholarship?• Does the student make a strong argument (their own informed opinion) supported by evidence? Projects should support and prove a thesis. Remember that student views may differ from your own.
60%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the student demonstrate an understanding of the historical context around the topic (economic, political, intellectual, physical, social, and cultural setting)?• Does the student provide analysis and interpretation of the data rather than just a description? Students should examine the meaning and impact of the topic, not simply describe it. Their entry should reflect a historical perspective such as the causes and effects of an event or the relationship of a local topic to larger events.• Does the annotated bibliography demonstrate wide research? Does it include appropriate and available primary and secondary sources?• Does the student show a balanced presentation of the materials? Are there multiple viewpoints?• Is the entry historically accurate?
Relation to Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How is this topic significant in history and in relation to the theme?• How did this topic influence history?• How did the historical context of an era (economic, political, intellectual, physical, social, and cultural setting) influence this topic in history and vice versa?
20%	
Clarity of Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the entry original, creative, and imaginative in subject and presentation?• Does the student communicate their ideas in an organized and effective way?
20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are the process paper and bibliography clearly organized?• Is text used in the project clear, grammatically correct, and accurately spelled?• Is the visual material organized and presented clearly?• Do students display stage presence in a performance?• Don't be swayed by glitz and glamour. Avoid giving "cute" points.• The message is most important; the medium is not the message.
Quality of Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The sole purpose of the interview is to encourage an active dialogue between historians and students on the process of historical research.• Projects stand alone. Don't judge what students say in an interview over what they have actually completed for their project.• Students are naturally nervous during their interviews!
0%	

Sample Interview Questions

Try to ask students at least three to five questions, or as many as time allows. Be consistent and ask mostly the same questions for each entry. Give students time to answer; they may need to formulate a response. If they ask you to repeat a question, try rephrasing it or breaking apart a multi-part question. Judges are welcome to ask relevant questions about the process or topic that are not listed here. These are just suggestions to help get you started.

- Begin by asking students an easy question:
 - How did you choose this topic?
 - How does your topic relate to this year's theme?
 - Why did you select the website/documentary/exhibit/paper/performance category?
 - For groups: Tell us about the role each of you had in the development of your project.

- Move on to more challenging questions. These questions help students demonstrate how they analyzed their topics and related it to broader themes in history. Examples of higher-level questions include:
 - Why was your event so important in history? What were the consequences of your event? How did your topic influence history? What do you think was the single most important factor that caused your topic to happen?
 - What was the most significant thing you learned about your event?
 - What is your thesis? Did it change over the course of your research process?
 - How did you do your research? What was your approach/process? Is there anything you wish you had done differently or would change if you could?
 - What primary sources did you find? Where/how did you find them? How did your primary sources help you to better understand your topic? What was your most important or favorite source? What websites did you use? What printed sources did you use? As you researched your topic, what surprised you the most?
 - Do you think you presented multiple sides of your topic? How? Did any of your sources provide conflicting evidence? How did you deal with this? Were some of the sources more credible than others?
 - What difficulties or challenges did you face while working on this project? How did you overcome them?
 - If the student has a topic in a content area in which you are familiar, then ask appropriate questions. Be careful not to overshadow their role as the expert.
 - If the student used a local history topic, can they relate this to the larger context of what was going on in the rest of the country/world? And vice versa—if the student used a national or international topic, can they relate this to what kind of impact this might have had on their local community?

- End the interview with a question that allows the student to bring up any other information they want to share:
 - Is there anything else you wanted to talk about that we haven't discussed yet?
- Make sure to thank them for participating in National History Day in North Dakota.

Inappropriate Questions and Comments:

- Avoiding asking students where they go to school, what their cultural/religious backgrounds are, or how much money they spent on their project.
- This is not a captive audience for your insights on a particular topic. Do not lecture students. This is their day to be the experts.

What Is Your Judge Profile?

Good judges embody these behaviors:

- Encourager** A great History Day judge introduces him- or herself, asks thoughtful questions, smiles, and lets the students talk. If it's a group project, judges should make sure that each student has a chance to answer questions.
- Inquirer** Good judges ask questions that show they want to hear what students have to say. Open-ended questions allow students to expand, describe, analyze, and display enthusiasm about their project. Asking a variety of questions allows students to talk about different aspects of their topic and gives them opportunities to bring up new and interesting information.
- Novelist** Detailed, constructive comments on evaluation forms provide ideas on project strengths as well as areas for improvement. This is the most important feedback students receive. Comments that demonstrate thoughtful consideration of the research and project are as good as gold to History Day students.
- Team Player** Excellent History Day judges make sure all the judges have equal opportunities to talk during the interview process. They work together to reach a consensus about which projects are moving on, which aren't, and why. They check with their fellow judges to make sure that all the ratings and written comments on evaluation forms are consistent. It can be confusing and disheartening to receive conflicting or unnecessarily repetitive feedback.

Good judges avoid these interview pitfalls:

- Wanderer** Students *are* experts on their chosen topic, but it doesn't mean they are experts about everything. Asking a student questions about something unrelated to his or her project is both unfair and discouraging. They should understand the general context of history surrounding their topic but be reasonable in your expectations for their breadth of knowledge.
- Lecturer** A judge may be one of the foremost experts on a student's topic—but that doesn't give them license to lecture the student about the topic and point out errors, missed analysis, or suggest different conclusions. Please remember that students work for months on their projects, and that they are *students* not professors.

- Dominator** Judges serve on teams, and it's important that each judge ask at least one question. One judge may be particularly enthusiastic about a project, but think of the interview as a conversation, with all parties taking part.
- Gusher** Judges sometimes are so effusive in their praise for a project that students leave the interview convinced they've won. Be careful to remain neutral and try to make sure you use consistent wording and phrasing with all students.
- Accuser** Judges sometimes come across projects that for one reason or another, set off alarm bells. Maybe the project is so professional that it's hard to believe a student did it. Maybe different parts of the narrative seem to be written by different people. Maybe students are having a hard time answering basic questions. Instead of confronting students with suspicions, judges should complete the interview, asking questions that try to address their concerns, and then report any misgivings to contest coordinators. Please do not accuse students directly of cheating, plagiarizing, or otherwise taking shortcuts. This is a matter for the contest coordinator and the student's coach to address.
- Blurter** Saying something about students' gender, ethnicity, culture, and appearance is completely unacceptable. Please, please, please think before you speak. How might a student interpret your comment? How about their parents or teacher? How would you feel if the same thing was said to you? Be thoughtful and deliberate in your interactions with students and keep your focus on the research project.